

12 Million Defective Vehicles Recalled Last Year

1972 was the biggest year yet for motor vehicle recalls. In 320 defect notification campaigns, manufacturers of cars, trucks and tires recalled 12,081,803 vehicles and tires.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration played a role in influencing 94 of those recalls, involving 8,310,170 vehicles, according to figures supplied *Status Report* by agency officials. The rest were conducted on manufacturer initiative. The agency estimates that only 80 per cent of all cars recalled are ever repaired.

This issue of *Status Report* deals largely with safety related motor vehicle defects, and includes articles on possible defects that NHTSA is investigating, current efforts by the agency to increase the amount of information it gathers on potential defects and new rules by the agency to make sure manufacturers tell consumers exactly why their vehicles are being recalled when defects are found.

AUTO CLUBS AID DEFECT SEARCH

NHTSA's defect investigation chief Andrew Detrick claims that the agency's program to enlist auto clubs in efforts to pinpoint defects is the "most effective thing we've come up with." Detrick told *Status Report* that he is "rather impressed" with the information the clubs have supplied in the nine cases in

which they've been involved since the program got under way five months ago. (See *Status Report*, Vol. 7, No. 13, July 17, 1972.)

NHTSA's use of auto clubs began last year when the agency entered into agreements with clubs in Missouri and California. On request from the agency the clubs use their diagnostic facilities to check members' vehicles when NHTSA suspects that a defect exists in certain makes or models. Detrick declined to disclose specific investigations in which the clubs are participating.

He said that the agency would like to expand this program by finding an auto club in an area with periods of "long cold weather and salt sea atmosphere." NHTSA has been looking in the northeastern part of the country but, so far, has not been successful in finding an auto club that has the necessary diagnostic facilities, he said.

Inside

- Defect Search Program Turns Up Collapsing Exhaust Pipes . . . Page 2
- NHTSA Opens Four, Closes Seven Defect Investigations In Three Months. . . Page 3
- Consumers To Get More Information In Defect Notification Letters . . . Page 4
- World Finds Auto Safety Off Axis . . . Page 5
- GM, Ford Favor, Chrysler Opposes NHTSA Request For VIN's . . . Page 6

Defect Search Program Turns Up Collapsing Exhaust Pipes

NHTSA has recently warned Ford and General Motors about exhaust pipe failures discovered in cars they manufacture. The faulty tail pipes turned up in an NHTSA defect identification project that uses independent repair shops to look for potentially defective motor vehicle components.

Although the agency claims that the exhaust pipe failures are not safety related, it has asked that "responsible individuals" at the two auto makers determine whether "this type of exhaust pipe should be used in the future."

The exhaust pipe failures were discovered by NHTSA as a result of the agency's 20 month old "parts return program." The program, which involves over 300 independent repair shops, is designed to provide NHTSA with defect information on older vehicles that are no longer under warranty.

Defects investigation director Andrew Detrick told *Status Report* that the agency brought the failures to the manufacturers' attention because NHTSA "has an obligation not to sit on information it has received" on parts failures, even if the failures are not safety related, but concern an "area of customer satisfaction." Detrick said that this was the first time that NHTSA has sent such a letter. The NHTSA letter to the two companies said that since collapses of the inner walls of the so-called dual wall exhaust pipes "are not easily determined visually, they generally result in considerable puzzlement to mechanics attempting to determine the cause of decreased engine performance."

EXHAUST PIPE BLOCKAGE PROHIBITED

According to NHTSA, its exterior protection standard is aimed at protecting safety related items. The standard singles out the exhaust system as one that may not be damaged under specific low speed crash test conditions. The standard (FMVSS 215) says, "The vehicle's exhaust system shall have no leaks or constrictions."

In describing the exhaust pipe failures, a "parts return program" report said that "the inner wall of these pipes collapsed and completely blocked the exhaust passage." Repair shops in the program were urged to check for the failures, since a collapsed exhaust pipe can "cause dangerous exhaust gas leakage in the engine area," according to a newsletter put out by the parts return program contractor. (Four Maryland loss reduction researchers have reported that more than 500 Americans may be dying each year from carbon monoxide poisoning in "vehicles that are defective due to deterioration, damage or poor automotive design." See *Status Report*, Vol. 7, No. 9, May 8, 1972.)

Defects director Detrick told *Status Report* that his office had examined the dual wall exhaust pipe problem and concluded that it did not "warrant further investigation," because there was "no safety related involvement."

NHTSA also has taken action on four other items of equipment found by the "parts return program" to have "significant failure trends." It has:

- Opened an investigation into Ford master cylinder failures;
- Reopened a previously terminated investigation on power brake vacuum check valve failures (the reopened investigation covers American Motors, Chrysler, Ford and General Motors vehicles);
- Decided that Ford brake hose failures did not involve a safety-related defect;

- Renewed investigation of motor mount failures on Ford and Checker vehicles. (General Motors has already recalled 6.6 million vehicles for motor mount failures.)

Detrick told *Status Report* that he is "disappointed" with the limited success of the "parts return program." However, he added that it is, "too soon to expect dramatic results." Detrick explained that the program suffers from "short-lived enthusiasm" of some of the repair shops, none of which are paid for taking part in the program. They are "very good for a while but slowly drift away," Detrick said.

Although only participating repair shops are placed on the mailing list for the "parts return program" newsletter, which identifies significant parts failures found in the program, the public can obtain copies for a minimal charge from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Technical Reference Division, Room 5108, 400 Seventh Street, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20590.

NHTSA Opens Four, Closes Seven Defect Investigations

Since *Status Report* last published NHTSA's list of defect investigations (*Status Report*, Vol. 7, No. 22, Nov. 27, 1972), the agency has initiated or reopened four investigations and completed seven others. Charts listing NHTSA's current defect investigations begin on page 7.

Significant investigations recently closed by NHTSA include:

- **Steering lock-up on 1971-1972 Chevrolets (case C2-40).** General Motors agreed to recall 3.7 million 1971-1972 Chevrolet, Buick, Oldsmobile and Pontiac models for installation of a gravel shield over the steering coupling. "The shield will prevent the possibility of flying stones lodging between the coupling and the frame of the car." GM said. This defect was first reported to NHTSA by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. (See *Status Report*, Vol. 8, No. 4, Feb. 12, 1973.)

- **Missing B-post welds on 1972 Pontiac Firebirds (case C2-33).** According to NHTSA, this case involved "the omission or partial omission of five spot welds on the body lock pillar of approximately 1,800 Pontiac Firebirds" built between October 14 through October 29, 1971, at the General Motors assembly plant in Norwood, Ohio. The "body lock pillar" is located immediately behind the front door. In deciding that no safety related defect was involved, NHTSA reasoned, "Although the absence of the alleged missing spot welds would cause some loss of side impact protection, it is quite probable that the Firebird [which has side door beams to resist intrusion] would still possess greater protection than the [Chevrolet] Nova/[Pontiac] Ventura body shell [which does not have side door intrusion beams], or many smaller foreign built automobiles." NHTSA said that the Nova/Ventura door design provides "relatively little resistance to side intrusion"

The following investigations were also closed after NHTSA determined that no defect exists:

- Power steering hose failures and resulting fires in the 1972 Ford LTDs (case C2-46);
- Wheel lug bolt failures in Bonanza trailers (case 169);
- Brake drum failures in 1964-1967 Dodge S-500D school buses (case 264);
- Excessive heat buildup in 1971 Oldsmobile Cutlass brakes (case C2-20);
- Ignition switch failures in 1969 Fords (case 266).

NHTSA Tightens Defect Letter Rule

Under new NHTSA rules governing the contents of defect notification letters, auto manufacturers will have to give consumers increased information about the defects that may exist in their car.

Firestone Freedom

The Firestone Tire and Rubber Co. wants to be free to tell consumers that tires aren't defective even after NHTSA has declared them so.

The tire maker claims that NHTSA's new defect notification rule "includes 'gag' provisions to which we take serious exception on Federal Constitutional grounds."

The provision which the tire maker claims is in violation of its "Federal Constitutional" rights, forbids manufacturers from making "any statement or implication" in its defect notification letters to consumers "that the problem discussed in the letter is not a defect, or that it does not relate to motor vehicle safety." Firestone has asked NHTSA to drop that provision from its rule.

John F. Floberg, vice president, secretary and general counsel of Firestone, told *Status Report* that his company views the "outrageous" provision as a "classic example of an abuse of bureaucratic authority."

NHTSA says the rules, which broaden the scope of information that manufacturers must include in their defect notification letters, are necessary because manufacturers in the past have taken "inadequate measures" to "alert car owners of possible dangers that exist when defects are found in motor vehicles or motor vehicle equipment." (See *Status Report*, Vol. 7, No. 13, July 17, 1972.)

Manufacturers are required by the National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act of 1966 to inform first purchasers and warranty holders by certified letter when safety related defects exist. The new regulation spells out, in detail, what those letters must tell consumers.

Among other things, the letters must include:

- A "description of the malfunction that might occur;"
- "Precautions, if any, that the purchaser should take to reduce the chance that the malfunction will occur before the vehicle is repaired;"
- A "general description" of the work necessary to repair the defect along with estimates of time and cost involved in the repair. (Cost estimates are not required if the manufacturer pays for the repairs.)

- Information on where and when repair parts will be available.

The safety administration says it received "many comments opposed" to the provisions that "prohibit the notification from stating or implying that the problem is not a defect, or that it does not relate to motor vehicle safety" or that "the manufacturer disagrees with the Administrator's finding" of defect. (NHTSA points out that if a manufacturer disagrees with the finding, it "can administratively and judicially challenge this determination . . . before sending a notification.")

"Notification letters are not intended to serve as forums where manufacturers can argue that

problems are not safety related or dispute the Administration's findings. Their purpose is to unambiguously and adequately induce owners to remedy a potentially hazardous situation," the agency said.

In its comments, Ford Motor Co. said that even though it is prohibited from making disclaimers in notification letters, "the public will be told explicitly or implicitly that the manufacturer does disagree [with the finding]. Since the news media still enjoys [sic] all of their constitutional rights, we are powerless to preclude this result."

Chrysler Corp., Firestone Tire and Rubber Co., Recreational Vehicle Institute, Inc., Wagner Electric Corp. and the Motor and Equipment Manufacturers Association have petitioned NHTSA to change the new rule. The rule (Docket No. 72-7) was printed in the *Federal Register*, Vol. 38, No. 15, Jan 23, 1973.

Magazine Finds World Of Highway Safety Off Axis

A national magazine has taken a close look at "highway safety" in America and found it wanting.

World Magazine, the general-circulation magazine started by publisher Norman Cousins last year, devotes most of its March 13 issue to a "central theme": that "25,000 lives could be saved this year in the United States — apart from 75,000 lives in the rest of the world — through existing automotive technology and the application of a little common sense."

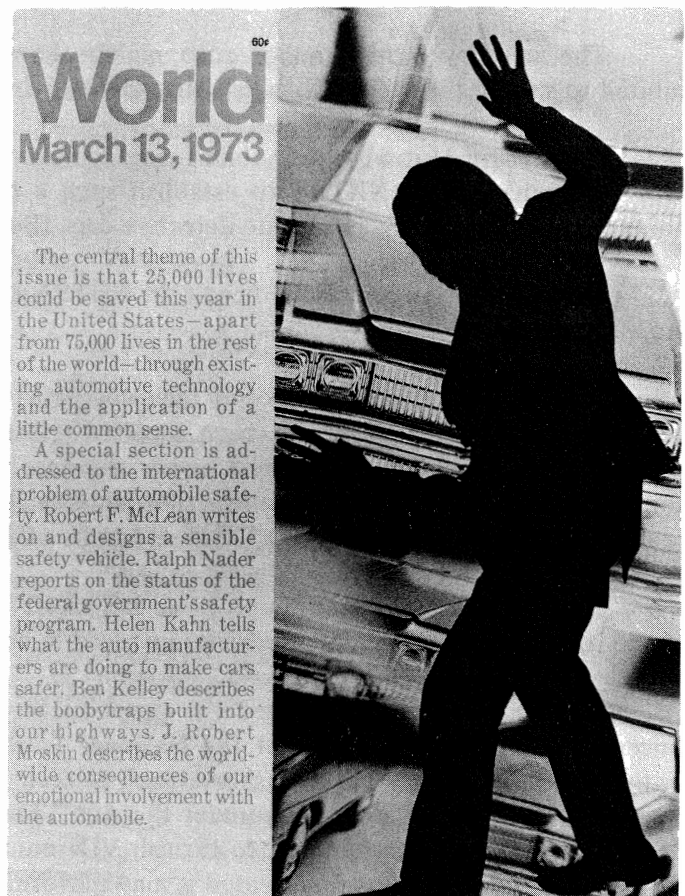
In a lead-off article, *World's* editor at large, J. Robert Moskin, singles out "four primary lines of attack" that he feels are being neglected by the so-called highway safety field:

Car Safety: "We are not going to stop the carnage until the car itself is safer and does not devour its occupants" in a crash. "Blame kids or carelessness or speed hunger," says Moskin, "but don't pass over the top-brass automobile manufacturers. They can build safer cars."

Speed: "Of course, we only tackle half of the speed problem. We post — and sometimes enforce — maximum speeds on our roads, but we continue to build cars that can go as much as fifty miles faster than those legal limits. It doesn't make much sense."

Boobytraps: "We spend billions on [building] our highways each year, but bad highways still kill. Tight curves, close-in abutments and poles, threatening guardrails, slippery surfaces, uncontrolled intersections.... The hazards are unending, but correcting them saves lives."

Drunk Drivers: "In 1969, Baton Rouge, Louisiana initiated a prearrest breath test with sixty days in jail for those who refused it. This project was developed by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety chiefly to question the



constitutionality of prearrest screening tests. In most states you have to be arrested before a breath test can be required We are still being too nice to drunk drivers, and they kill.”

Other articles in the special issue include:

- “The Game of Deadly Numbers,” in which *World* staff writer Susan Heath questions the National Safety Council’s emphasis on “the death prediction business” and criticizes its “pile of slogans.”
- “Who Wants Safer Cars,” companion articles, by *Automotive News* correspondent Helen Kahn and attorney Ralph Nader, dissecting the reactions of the auto manufacturing industry and the federal government to public demands for increased auto safety.
- “Our Boobytrapped Highways,” an analysis by IIHS’s communications vice president, Ben Kelley, of the national roadside hazard problem and its readily available countermeasures.

World Magazine is located at 488 Madison Ave., New York 10022.

Auto Makers Split On NHTSA VIN Proposal

The country’s three major auto makers have split 2-to-1 on NHTSA’s proposal that they be required to supply the agency with lists that identify defective cars by vehicle identification number.

State Farm Mutual Automobile Insurance Co. Vice President Thomas C. Morrill and the Center for Auto Safety had asked NHTSA to establish such a requirement in order that insurance companies and others could help identify and locate defective cars. (See *Status Report*, Vol. 7, No. 13, July 17, 1972.)

General Motors and Ford have told NHTSA they generally agree with the proposed requirement. Chrysler opposes it.

Both Ford and General Motors have suggested that the agency require auto makers to supply only the VIN’s for cars that have not been repaired within the first six months of a recall campaign. “Our experience indicates that the greatest owner response to a notification campaign occurs during the first six months. It is after the first six months that additional steps in locating those vehicles which have not been repaired would be most productive,” GM said in its official comment on NHTSA’s proposed rule.

Ford said it “believes this proposal has merit” and “is willing to provide the Administration with vehicle identification numbers of vehicles involved in notification campaigns.”

But Chrysler Corp. attacked the proposal as potentially “costly, ineffective and unfeasible to all concerned.” Chrysler claimed that the National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act of 1966 does not “authorize the Secretary [of Transportation] to seek VIN’s for purposes of enabling others to do what is already required of manufacturers under the Act.” The auto maker said in its comment to NHTSA that “it believes it should not be required to furnish VIN numbers [sic] in aid of a notification system that only one insurance company has represented it may perform but has not promised to perform.”

**Subjects of Current NHTSA
Safety Related Defect Investigations**

Priority I March 12, 1973

CASE	MAKE	MODEL	YEAR	COMPONENT	POSSIBLE PROBLEM
161	American Motors, Chrysler, Ford, General Motors	All models	1963-1971	Power brake vacuum check valve	No power assist with loss of valve cover
C3-09	B.F. Goodrich	7.35-14	1967-1971	Space saver tire	Insufficient instructions for mounting tire on rim
C3-17	British Leyland	Triumph TR-6	1971-1972	Fuel tank and filler neck connection	Leaks when filling tank
150	Budd, Firestone, Kelsey-Hayes	RH5⁰ Wheels for medium trucks	Various	Wheel	Accidental explosive disassembly
258.9*	Checker	All models	1965-1969	Engine mount	Secondary effects from shearing of engine mount
C3-03	Chrysler	All full-size Chryslers, Dodges, Plymouths	1969-1972	Bulkhead electrical connector	Becomes disconnected
297	Firestone	Front tires on GMC parcel delivery vans 4903 & 4905	1969-1970	Front tire	Excessive heat buildup
258.6*	Ford	All models	1965-1972	Engine mount	Secondary effects from shearing of engine mount
C3-10	Ford	Lincoln Continental Mark IV	1972	Tie rod sleeve	Breakage
C3-12	Ford	LTD Country Squire	1972	Steering wheel nut	Lack of quality control during assembly

*Initiated or reopened since November 17, 1972.

Bold face entries under NHTSA investigation two or more years.

Priority I

CASE	MAKE	MODEL	YEAR	COMPONENT	POSSIBLE PROBLEM
98	Ford	Cougar, Mustang	1966-1970	Drop-in fuel tank vent	Certain vents ex- posed to rupture by shifting luggage
140	Ford	Cougar, Mustang	1968-1969	Seat back pivot arm	Inboard pivot failure
287	Ford	Galaxie	1968-1969	Front wheel spindle	Fatigue crack in heel area
212	Ford	Full size	1965-1969	Lower con- trol arm	Fatigue failure
128	Ford	Light trucks	Various	16" two- piece wheel	Lock ring gutter failure
215	Goodyear	KB-KW wheels for medium & heavy trucks	Various	20" two- piece wheel	Accidental explo- sive disassembly
C3-11	Cadillac	All models	1959-1960	Steering pit- man arm	Fatigue failure
209	Chevrolet	Biscayne	1969	Rear suspen- sion tie rod	Failure under load
C3-18	Chevrolet	Impala	1969-1970	Steering wheel	Breakage
252	Chevrolet	½-ton van and passenger cars	1969	Steering tie rod end	Suspected fatigue failure in thread section
C3-07	General Motors	GMC Astro-95 truck	1971-1972	Steering pit- man arm	Deterioration of steering control
258.5	General Motors	Buick, Cadillac, Oldsmobile, Pontiac	1965-1969	Engine mount	Secondary effects from shearing of engine mount
132	General Motors	All models	1965-1966	Quadrajct carburetor	Fuel leakage at plug

*Initiated or reopened since November 17, 1972.

Bold face entries under NHTSA investigation two or more years.

Priority I •

CASE	MAKE	MODEL	YEAR	COMPONENT	POSSIBLE PROBLEM
C3-02	Honda motorcycle	CB 750, CB 500 & CB 450 (K3 & K4)	All	Gas filler cap	Becomes dislodged allowing gas to be ignited
C2-23	Mack trucks	Mack truck tractor	1969-1970	Front suspension, saddle block & U-bolt	Breakage
C3-20	Nissan Motors	Datsun 240-Z	1970-1972	Front disc brake piston	Corrosion of disc brake caliper pistons
C3-21*	Renault	R-16	1968-1970	Front axle shaft	Hydraulic brake line severage
C2-60	Volkswagen	All models	Pre-1963	Heater	Engine fumes in passenger compartment
278	Volkswagen	All models	1965-1971	Seat and seat track	Seat track separation during crashes
C2-59	Volkswagen	Karmann Ghia	1971-1972	Fuel tank	Leakage

Priority II

CASE	MAKE	MODEL	YEAR	COMPONENT	POSSIBLE PROBLEM
190	All manufacturers	Travel trailers	1965-1970	Wheels, axles and tires	Overloading of suspension components
C2-09	All manufacturers	All models	All	Motorcycle helmets	Units providing inadequate protection
C3-08	American Motors	All	1971-1973	Fasteners for front suspension	Insufficient torque control on critical fasteners
C3-13	American Motors	Ambassador, Matador	1973	Fuel tank	Leakage due to poor soldering

*Initiated or reopened since November 17, 1972.

Bold face entires under NHTSA investigation two or more years.

Priority II

CASE	MAKE	MODEL	YEAR	COMPONENT	POSSIBLE PROBLEM
C2-05	American Motors	Jeepster	1971	Service brake	Rear brake lockup
C2-51	Avco Motor Homes	Grand Lodge	1971	Gas tank location	Fume intrusion into electrical circuitry box
291	Ford	Capri	1971	Evaporative emission system	Engine fires
C2-50	Ford	B7000 school bus	Various	Air brake hose	Rubbing at cross-member may cause rupture
C2-25	Ford	School bus	1966	Brake line	Corrosion failure
C3-14	Ford	LTD Country Squire	1973	Rear bumper support	Incomplete welds
282	Ford	Full size	1965-1970	15x5 wheel	Inner bead seat failure
C2-53	Ford	All models	1967-1971	Brake master cylinder	Corrosion in cylinder
C2-61	Ford	Full size	1968-1971	15x6.5 wheel	Rivet, weld and/or disc failure
C2-32	General Motors	GMC, Chevrolet pick-up	Various	15",16" single-piece wheel	Inner bead seat failure
C3-15	Plymouth	Valiant	1973	Upper control arm cam bolt	Low or insufficient torque control on bolt
C2-45	Hamill Manufacturing Co.	Protecta-tot Model 9013	Various	Child seat	Potential restraint problem
C3-16	International Harvester	Travelall	1972	Fuel tank and front suspension fastener bolts	Miscellaneous quality control
C3-06	International Harvester	DCF 400	1971-1972	Exhaust system	Exhaust leakage, engine fume intrusion into cab

*Initiated or reopened since November 17, 1972.

Bold face entries under NHTSA investigation two or more years.

Priority II

CASE	MAKE	MODEL	YEAR	COMPONENT	POSSIBLE PROBLEM
248	International Harvester	1600, 1700S, 1800 bus	1958-1970	Brake shoe	Shoe separation from reinforcement web
276	International Harvester	1200D	1970	Front spring U-bolt	Breakage
C2-08	International Harvester	Step-in van	1970-1971	Steering linkage	Wheel oscillations on rough surfaces
C2-54	Norton Villiers, Ltd. Motorcycle	Commando 750 cc	Various	Yoke	Cracking
C2-55	Open Road Motor Home	Chevrolet 350 chassis	1970-1972	Front axle	Possible overloading
C2-18	Rockwell Standard	Various trucks	1970-1971	Front axle hub	Flaw in casting
C2-19	Rockwell Standard	Tandem axle trailers	1960-1963	Axle spindle	Overstress condition
C3-19	Toyota	Land Cruiser	1972	Heater hose and gas tank	Routing of hoses through interior of vehicle and location of gas tank
C2-28	Warner Electric Brake Co.	Various	Various	Electric brake	Magnet clutch failure
C2-38	Webb Wheel Div.	Semi-trailer	Various	20" wheel	Flaw in casting
303	Volkswagen	Microbus	1970	Brake	Brake fade
C3-22*	Volkswagen	Type I	1967-1973	Seat belt and shoulder harness	Degradation due to battery acid contamination
51	(In litigation)			3-piece wheel	

*Initiated or reopened since November 17, 1972.

Bold face entries under NHTSA investigation two or more years.

(Contents may be republished, whole or in part, with attribution.)

the highway
loss reduction

STATUS REPORT

Ralph W. Hoar, Jr., Editor

INSURANCE INSTITUTE for HIGHWAY SAFETY
WATERGATE SIX HUNDRED • WASHINGTON, D.C. 20037
(AREA CODE 202-333-0770)

IIHS MASTER FILE COPY